

The Origins of Political Science

Lecture Series: The Problem of Socrates

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I begin with a word of thanks to my colleague and friend Herman Pritchett. I feel much happier after he said these words because I feel less of an orphan. Otherwise I would have presented a series of public lectures entirely on my own responsibility, and I am glad that this responsibility is shared. I am also glad that the introduction implied that I am a bona fide political scientist, because quite a few passages of these lectures someone might think are¹ very marginal as far as political science is concerned, an opinion with which I do not agree.

By political science we understand such a study of political things as is not subject to any authority, nor simply a part of political activity or simply ancillary to political activity. Originally political science was identified with political philosophy. The distinction between political science and political philosophy is a consequence of the distinction between science in general and philosophy in general, and that distinction is of fairly recent date. Political philosophy or political science was originally the quest for the best regime or the best society, or the doctrine regarding the best regime or the best society, a pursuit which includes the study of all kinds of regimes.

The political philosopher was originally a man not engaged in political activity who attempted to speak about the best regime. If we seek, therefore, for the origins of political science, we merely have to identify the first man not engaged in political activity who attempted to speak about the best regime. No less a man than Aristotle himself informs us about that man. His name was Hippodamus from Miletus. Hippodamus's best regime had three chief characteristics. His citizen body consisted of three parts, the artisans, the farmers, and the fighters. The land belonging to his city consisted of three parts, the sacred, the common, and everyone's own. The laws too consisted only of three parts, laws regarding outrage, laws regarding damage, and laws regarding homicide. The scheme is distinguished by its apparent simplicity and clarity. But, as Aristotle observes, after having considered it, it involves much confusion. The confusion is caused by the desire for the utmost clarity and simplicity. Outstanding among the particulars which Hippodamus suggested is his proposal that those who invent something beneficial for the city should receive honors from that

city. When examining this proposal, Aristotle brings out the fact that Hippodamus hadn't given thought to the tension between political stability and technological change. On the basis of some observations² we have made closer to home, we suspect the existence of a connection between Hippodamus's unbridled concern with clarity and simplicity and his unbridled concern with technological progress. His proposal as a whole seems to lead not only to confusion but to permanent confusion, or permanent revolution. The unusual strangeness of the thought induces Aristotle to give an unusually extensive account of the man who had fathered it. I quote, "He also invented the division of cities into planned parts and he cut up the harbor of Athens. In his other activity too he was led by ambition to be somewhat eccentric so that some thought he lived in too overdone a way. He attracted attention by the quantity and expensive adornment of his hair, and also by the adorned character of his cheap but warm³ clothes which he wore not only in winter but in summer periods as well. And he wished to be known as learned in giving an account of nature as a whole." It looks as if a peculiar account of nature as a whole, an account which used the number three as the key to all things, enabled or compelled Hippodamus to build on it his triadic plan of the best city. It looks as if Hippodamus had applied a formula elaborated in a mathematical physics to political things in the hope thus to achieve the utmost clarity and simplicity. But in fact he arrives at utter confusion since he has not paid attention to the specific character of political things. He did not see that political things are in a class by themselves. Our search for the origin of political science has led to a mortifying and somewhat disappointing result. Hippodamus may have been the first political scientist; his thought⁴ cannot have been the origin of political science or political philosophy. We may wonder whether this is not⁵ a deserved punishment for the fact that we raised the question regarding the origin of political science without having raised the previous question as to why the inquiry into the origin of our science is relevant or necessary.

Every concern for the past which is more than idle curiosity is rooted in a dissatisfaction with the present. In the best case that dissatisfaction proceeds from the fact that no present is self-sufficient. Given the extreme rarity of wisdom, the wisdom of the wise men of any present needs for its support the wisdom of the wise men of the past. But the dissatisfaction with the present may have more peculiar or more distressing reasons than the general reason. Let us cast a glance at the present state of political science. What I am going to say is less concerned with what the majority of political scientists in fact do than with what the prevalent or at any rate most vocal methodology tells them to do. The majority of empirical political scientists, at least at the University of Chicago, are engaged in studies which are meaningful and useful from every methodological point of view. Political philosophy has been superseded by a non-philosophic political science, by a positivistic political science. That political science is scientific to the extent to which it can predict. According to the

positivistic view political philosophy is impossible. Yet the question raised by political philosophy remains alive. It retains the evidence which it naturally possesses. It will do no harm if we remind ourselves of that evidence.

All political action is concerned with either preservation or change. If it preserves it means to prevent a change for the worse; if it changes it means to bring about some betterment. Political action is then guided by considerations of better and worse, but one cannot think of better or worse without implying some thought of good or bad. All political action is then guided by some notion of good or bad. But these notions as they primarily appear have the character of opinion; they present themselves as unquestionable, but on reflection they prove to be questionable. As such, as opinions, they point to such thoughts⁶ of good and bad as are no longer questionable, they point to knowledge of good and bad. Or more precisely they point to knowledge of the complete political good, i.e., of the essential character of the good society. If all political action points to the fundamental question of political philosophy, and if therefore the fundamental question of political philosophy retains its original evidence, political philosophy is a constant temptation for thinking men. Positivistic political science is certain that that fundamental question cannot be answered rationally, but only emotionally, that is to say, that it cannot be answered at all. Positivistic political science is therefore constantly endangered by both the urgent and the evident character of the fundamental question raised by political philosophy. It is therefore compelled to pay constant polemical or critical attention to political philosophy. The most elaborate form which that attention can take is a history of political philosophy as a detailed proof of the impossibility of political philosophy,—see Sabine,—in any manner or form. That history fulfills the function to show that political philosophy is impossible, or, more precisely, obsolete. Prior to the emergence of non-philosophic political science men justifiably dedicated themselves to political philosophy. Political philosophy was inevitable before the human mind had reached its present maturity. Political philosophy is then still for all practical purposes indispensable in the form of history of political philosophy. Or, in other words, political philosophy is superseded by history of political philosophy. Such a history would naturally begin at the beginning and therefore raise the question as to the identity of the first political philosopher. If it does its job with some degree of competence, it will begin with Hippodamus of Miletus and be satisfied with that beginning. One may, however, wonder whether this kind of history of political philosophy is of any value. If we know beforehand that the history of political philosophy is the history of a capital error, one lacks the necessary incentive for dedicated study. One has no reason for entering into the thought of the past with sympathy, eagerness, or respect, or for taking it seriously.

Above all the necessary and sufficient proof of the impossibility of political philosophy is provided not by the history of political science but by present day logic. Hence people begin to wonder whether an up to date training in political

science requires in any way the study, however perfunctory, of the history of political philosophy. They would argue as follows: The political scientist is concerned with the political scene of the present age, with a situation which is wholly unprecedented, which therefore calls for unprecedented solutions, not to say for an entirely new kind of politics, perhaps a judicious mixture of politics and psychoanalysis. Only a man contemporary with that wholly unprecedented situation can think intelligently about it. All thinkers of the past lacked the minimum requirement for speaking intelligently about what is the only concern of the political scientist, namely, the present political situation. Above all, all earlier political thought was fundamentally unscientific; it has the status of folklore; the less we know of it the better; let us therefore make a clean sweep. I do not believe that this step is advisable. It is quite true that we are confronted with an unprecedented political situation. Our political situation has nothing in common with any earlier political situation except that it is a political situation. The human race is still divided into a number of independent political societies which are separated from one another by unmistakable and sometimes formidable frontiers, and there is still a variety not only of societies and governments, but of kinds of governments. The distinct political societies have distinct and by no means necessarily harmonious interests. A difference of kinds of governments, and therefore of the spirit more or less effectively permeating the different societies, and therefore the image which these societies have of their future, makes harmony altogether impossible. The best one can hope for, from the point of view of our part of the globe, is uneasy coexistence. But one can only hope for it. In the decisive respect we are completely ignorant of the future. However unprecedented our political situation may be, it has this in common with all political situations of the past. In the most important respect political action is ignorant of the outcome. Our scientific political science is as incapable reliably to predict the outcome as the crudest mythology was. In former times people thought that the outcome of conflict is unpredictable because one cannot know in advance how long this or that outstanding man is going to live, or how the opposed armies will act in the test of battle. We have been brought to believe that chance can be controlled or does not seriously affect the broad issues of society. Yet the science which is said to have rendered possible this control of chance has itself become the locus of chance. Man's fate depends now more than ever on science and technology, hence on discoveries and inventions, hence on events whose occurrence is by their very nature unpredictable. A simply unprecedented political situation would be a situation of vitally important political conflict whose outcome and its consequences could be predicted with perfect certainty. In other words, the victory of predicting political science would require the disappearance of vitally important political conflict, in a word, the disappearance of situations of political interest.

But let us assume that the positivistic notion of political science is entirely sound. We see already today when that science is still in its infancy that there is

a gulf between the political scientist's and the citizen's understanding of political things. They literally do not speak the same language. The more political science becomes scientific, the clearer becomes the fact that the perspective of the citizen and the perspective of the political scientist differ. It therefore becomes all the more necessary to understand the difference of perspective and to perform the transition from the primary perspective, the perspective of the citizen, to the secondary or derivative perspective, the perspective of the political scientist, not dogmatically and haphazardly, but in an orderly and responsible fashion. For this purpose one requires an articulate understanding of the citizen's perspective as such. Only thus can one understand the essential genesis of the perspective of the political scientist out of the perspective of the citizen. The safest empirical basis for such an inquiry is the study of the historical genesis of political science, or the study of the origin of political science. In this way we can see with our own eyes how political science emerged for the first time, and therefore, of course in a still primitive form, out of the pre-scientific understanding of political things. Positivistic political science did not emerge directly out of the citizen's understanding of political things. Positivistic political science came into being by virtue of a very complex transformation of modern political philosophy, and modern political philosophy in its turn emerged by virtue of a very complex transformation of classical political philosophy. An adequate understanding of positivistic political science, as distinguished from a mere use of that science, is not possible except through a study of the political writings of Plato and Aristotle, for these writings are the most important documents of the emergence of political science out of the pre-scientific understanding of political things. These writings of Plato and Aristotle are the most important documents of the origin of political science.

The most striking characteristic of positivistic political science is the distinction between facts and values. The distinction means that only questions of fact and no questions of value can be settled by science or by human reason in general. Any end which a man may pursue, is, before the tribunal of reason, as good as any other end. Or, before the tribunal of human reason, all ends are equal. Reason has its place in the choice of means for pre-supposed ends. The most important question, the question regarding the ends, does not lie within the province of reason at all. A bachelor without kith and kin who dedicates his whole life to the amassing of the largest possible amount of money, provided he goes about this pursuit in the most efficient way, leads as rational a life as the greatest benefactor of his country or of the human race. The denial of the possibility of rationality, distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate ends, leads naturally to the denial of the possibility of a common good. As a consequence, it becomes impossible to conceive of society as a genuine whole which is capable to act. Society is understood as a kind of receptacle, or a pool, within which individuals and groups act, or, society becomes the resultant of the actions of individuals and groups. In other words political society, which is

society *qua* acting, namely acting through its government or as government, appears as derivative from society. Hence political science becomes an appendage of sociology. Since a choice of ends is not and cannot be rational, all conduct is, strictly speaking, non-rational. Political science as well as any other science, is a study of non-rational behavior, but like any other science, political science is a rational study of non-rational behavior.

Let us then look at the rationality of the study. Scientific knowledge of political things is preceded by what is loosely called common sense knowledge of political things. From the point of view of positivistic political science common sense knowledge of political things is suspect prior to examination; i.e., prior to transformation into scientific knowledge, it has the status of folklore. This leads to the consequence that much toil and money must be invested in order to establish facts with which, to say the least, every sane adult is thoroughly familiar. But this is not all and not the most important point. According to the most extreme, but yet by no means uncharacteristic view, no scientific finding of any kind can be definitive. I quote: "Empirical propositions are one and all hypotheses; there are no final propositions." For common sense the proposition, "Hitler's regime was destroyed in 1945", is a final proposition, in no way subject to future revision or in no way a hypothesis. If propositions of this kind and nature must be understood as hypotheses requiring further and further testing, political science is compelled to become ever more empty and ever⁸ more remote from what the citizen cannot help regarding as the important issues. Yet science cannot rest satisfied with establishing facts of its observation;⁹ it consists in inductive reasoning, or it is concerned with prediction, or the discovery of causes. As regards causality, present-day positivism teaches that there can be no other justification for inductive reasoning than that it succeeds in practice. In other words, causal laws are no more than laws of probability. Probability statements are derived from frequencies observed and include the assumption that the same frequencies will hold approximately for the future. But this assumption has no rational basis. It is not based on any evident necessity; it is a mere assumption. There is no rational objection to the assumption that the universe will disappear any moment, not only into thin air, but into absolute nothingness, and that this happening will be a vanishing not only into nothing, but through nothing as well. What is true of the possible end of the world must apply to its beginning. Since the principle of causality has no evidence, nothing prevents us from assuming that the world has come into being out of nothing and through nothing. Not only has rationality disappeared from the behavior studied by the science, the rationality of that study itself has become radically problematical. All coherence has gone. Rationality may be thought to survive by virtue of the retention of the principle of contradiction as a principle of necessary and universal validity. But the status of this principle has become wholly obscure since it is neither empirical nor dependent on any agreement, convention, or logical construction. We are then entitled to say that

positivistic science in general¹⁰ and therefore positivistic political science in particular are characterized by the abandonment of reason, or by the flight from reason. The flight from scientific reason which has been noted with some regret in certain quarters is the perfectly rational reply to the flight of science from reason. However this may be, the abandonment of reason, hitherto discussed, is only the weak, academic, not to say anemic reflection, but by no means an¹¹ uninteresting and unimportant reflection,¹² of a much broader and deeper process whose fundamental character we must try to indicate.

Present day positivism is logical positivism. With some justice it traces its origins to Hume. It deviates from Hume in two decisive respects. In the first place: deviating from Hume's teaching, it is a logical teaching, that is to say, it is not a psychological teaching. The supplement to the critique of reason in logical positivism is symbolic logic and theory of probability. In Hume that supplement is belief and natural instinct. The sole concern of logical positivism is a logical analysis of science. It has learned from Kant, the great critic of Hume, that the question of the validity of science is radically different from the question of its psychological genesis. Yet Kant was enabled to transcend psychology because he recognized what he called an *a priori*, let us say, act of pure reason. Hence science was for him the actualization of a potentiality natural to man. Logical positivism rejects the *a priori*. Therefore it cannot avoid becoming involved in psychology, for it is impossible to avoid the question, why science? On the basis of the positivistic premises, science must be understood as the activity of a certain kind of organism, as an activity fulfilling an important function in the life of this kind of organism. In brief, man is an organism, which cannot live, or live well, without being able to predict, and the most efficient form of prediction is science. This way of accounting for science has become extremely questionable. In the age of thermo-nuclear weapons the positive relation of science to human survival has lost all the apparent evidence which it formerly may have possessed. Furthermore, the high development of science requires industrial society;⁹ the predominance of industrial societies renders ever more difficult the survival of underdeveloped societies, or pre-industrial societies. Who still dares to say that the development of these societies, that is to say their transformation, that is to say, the destruction of their traditional manner of living, is a necessary prerequisite for these people's living, or living well? Those people survived and sometimes lived happily without any science. While it becomes necessary to trace science to the needs of a certain kind of organism, it is impossible to do so. For to the extent to which science could be shown to have a necessary function for the life of man, one would in fact pass a rational value judgment on science, and rational value judgments are declared to be impossible by this same school of thought.

By this remark we touch on the second decisive respect in which present-day positivism deviates from Hume. Hume was still a political philosopher. He still taught that there are universally valid rules of justice, and that those rules may

properly be called natural law. This means from the point of view of his present day followers that his thought antedated the discovery of the significance of cultural diversity or of historical change. As everyone knows, the most popular argument for proving the impossibility of rational or universally valid value judgments is taken from the fact of such diversity and change. All present day thought is separated from Hume by what is sometimes called the discovery of history. The vulgar expression of this decisive change is the trite proposition: man does not think in a vacuum. All thought is said to be essentially dependent on the specific historical situation in which it occurs. This applies not only to the content of thought, but to its character as well. Human science itself must be understood as a historical phenomenon. It is essential not to man but to a certain historical type of man. Therefore the full understanding of science cannot be supplied by the logical analysis of science, or by psychology. The premises of science, or the essential character of science, as it is laid down by the logical analysis of science, owe their evidence, or meaningfulness, to history, since everything which can possibly become the object of thought is as such dependent on the structure of thought, or, if you wish, of logical constructs. The fundamental science will be a historical psychology. But this fundamental science cannot have its locus outside of history. It is itself historical. History must be conceived as a process which is in principle unfinishable and whose course is unpredictable. The historical process is not completed and it is not rational. Science in general and hence the fundamental science, which is historical psychology in particular, is located within the process. It depends on premises which are not evident to man as man but which are imposed on specific men, on specific historical types, by history.

The first man who drew this conclusion from the discovery of history was Nietzsche. He was therefore confronted with this basic difficulty. The fundamental science, historical psychology, claims as science to be objective, but owing to its radically historical character it cannot help being subjective. It is easy to say that Nietzsche never solved this problem. It is most important for us to note that he was distinguished from all his contemporaries by the fact that he saw an abyss where the others saw only a reason for self-complacency. He saw with unrivaled clarity the problem of the twentieth century, because he had diagnosed more clearly than anyone else, prior to the World Wars at any rate, the crisis of modernity. At the same time he realized that the necessary, although not the sufficient reason for the overcoming of this crisis, or for a human future, was a return to the origins. Nietzsche regarded modernity as a movement toward a goal, or the project of a goal, which might very well be reached, but only at the price of the most extreme degradation of man. He described that goal most forcefully in Zarathustra's speech on the Last Man. The Last Man is a man who has achieved happiness. His life is free from all suffering, misery, insoluble riddles, conflicts, and inequality, and therefore free from all great tasks, from all heroism, and from all dedication. The characteris-

tic proximate condition of this life is the availability of what we are entitled to call psychoanalysis and tranquilizers. Nietzsche believed that this life was the intended or unintended goal of anarchism, socialism, and communism, and that democracy and liberalism were only half-way houses on the road to communism. Man's possible humanity and greatness, he held, requires the perpetuity of conflict, of suffering; one must therefore reject the very desire for the redemption from these evils in this life, to say nothing of a next.

The modern project stands or falls by science, by the belief that science can in principle solve all riddles and loosen all fetters. Science being the activity of¹³ reason *par excellence*, the modern project¹⁴ appears as the final form of rationalism, of the belief in the unlimited power of reason and in the essentially beneficent character of reason. Rationalism is optimism. Optimism was originally the doctrine that the actual world is the best possible world because nothing exists of whose existence a sufficient reason cannot be given. Optimism became eventually the doctrine that the actual world can and will be transformed by man into the best imaginable world, the realm of freedom, freedom from oppressions, scarcity, ignorance, and egoism,—heaven on earth. The reaction to it calls itself pessimism, that is to say, the doctrine that the world is necessarily evil, that the essence of life is blind will, and that salvation consists in negating world or life. Politically speaking this meant that the reply to the atheism of the left, communism, was an atheism of the right, an unpolitical atheism with political implications, the pessimism of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche's teacher. Schopenhauer's pessimism did not satisfy Nietzsche because Schopenhauer was compelled by his premises to understand the negating of life and world, or what he called saintliness, as a work or product of life and world. World and life cannot be negated legitimately if they are the cause of saintliness and salvation. Schopenhauer's pessimism did not satisfy Nietzsche for the further reason that the approaching crisis of the twentieth century seemed to call for a counter position which was no less militant, no less prepared to sacrifice everything for a glorious future, than communism in its way was. The passive pessimism of Schopenhauer had to give way to Nietzsche's active pessimism. It was in Nietzsche's thought that the attack on reason, of which the flight from reason is only a pale reflex, reached its most intransigent form.

Nietzsche first presented his thought in a book called *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*. This book is based on the premise that Greek culture is the highest of all cultures, and that Greek tragedy, the tragedy of Aeschylus and Sophocles, is the peak of that peak. The decay of tragedy begins with Euripides. Here we are confronted with a strange self contradiction in the traditional admiration for classical Greek antiquity. The tradition combines the highest admiration for Sophocles with the highest admiration for Socrates, for the tradition believed in the harmony of the true, the good, and the beautiful. Yet according to the clearest pieces of evidence, among which a Delphic Oracle is

not the least important, Socrates belongs together not with Sophocles, but with Euripides. There is a gulf, an unbridgeable gulf, between classical tragedy at its height and Socrates. Socrates did not understand classical tragedy. Socrates through his influence on Euripides and others destroyed classical tragedy. In order to achieve this supreme act of destruction, Socrates must have had a truly demonic power, he must have been a demi-god. Not his knowledge, but his instinct compelled him to regard knowledge and not instinct as the highest, to prefer the lucidity of knowledge and insight, the awakens of criticism, and the precision of dialectics, to instinct, divining, and creativity. As a genius, and even the incarnation of critical thought, he is the non-mystic, and the non-artist *par excellence*. Socrates' praise of knowledge means that the whole is intelligible and that knowledge of the whole is the remedy for all evils, that virtue is knowledge and that the virtue which is knowledge is happiness. This optimism is the death of tragedy. Socrates is the proto-type and first ancestor of the theoretical man, of the man for whom science, the quest for truth, is not a job or a profession but a way of life, that which enables him to live and to die. Socrates is therefore not only the most problematic phenomenon of antiquity but "the one turning point and vortex in the history of mankind".

In shrill and youthful accents Nietzsche proclaims Socrates to be the originator of rationalism, or of the belief in reason, and to see in rationalism the most fateful strand in the history of mankind. We shall be less repelled by Nietzsche's partly indefensible statement if we make an assumption which Nietzsche fails to make and to which he does not even refer, but which Socrates made, the assumption that the thesis of the intelligibility of the whole means the following. To understand something means to understand it in the light of purpose. Rationalism is indeed optimism, if rationalism implies the assumption of the initial or final supremacy of the good. Rationalism is indeed optimism if rationalism demands a teleological understanding of the whole. There is good evidence for the assertion that Socrates originated philosophic teleology.

According to the tradition it was not Hippodamus from Miletus, but Socrates who founded political philosophy. In the words of Cicero, which have frequently been quoted, "Whereas philosophy prior to Socrates was concerned with numbers and motions and with whence all things came and where they go, Socrates was the first to call philosophy down from heaven and to place it in cities, and even to introduce it into the household, and to compel philosophy to inquire about life and manners and about good and bad." In other words, Socrates was the first to make the central theme of philosophy human action, that is to say, purposeful activity, and hence to understand purpose as a key to the whole.

I have tried to show why it has become necessary for us to study the origin of political science. This means, as appears now, that it is necessary for us to study the problem of Socrates. A few words in conclusion. The problem of Socrates is ultimately the question of the worth of the Socratic position. But it

is primarily a more technical question, a merely historical question. Socrates never wrote a line. We know Socrates only from four men who were more or less contemporary with him. Aristophanes's comedy the *Clouds*, Xenophon's Socratic writings, the Platonic dialogues, and a number of remarks by Aristotle are the chief and most important sources. Of these four sources Xenophon's Socratic writings appear at first glance the most important ones, because Xenophon is the only of these four men who was a contemporary of Socrates and at the same time the man who¹⁵ has shown in deed that he was able and willing to write history, for Xenophon wrote the famous continuation of Thucydides' History. But I shall not in my discussion begin with an analysis of Xenophon, but I shall follow the chronological order, because the oldest statement on Socrates which we possess in completeness is Aristophanes's comedy, the *Clouds*, to which I will devote the next meeting.